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SKETCHES
OF
EARLY METHODISM

IN THE BLACK COUNTRY.

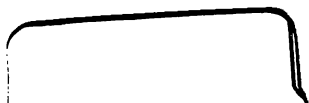
WITH THE
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LEEK-SEED CHAPEL.

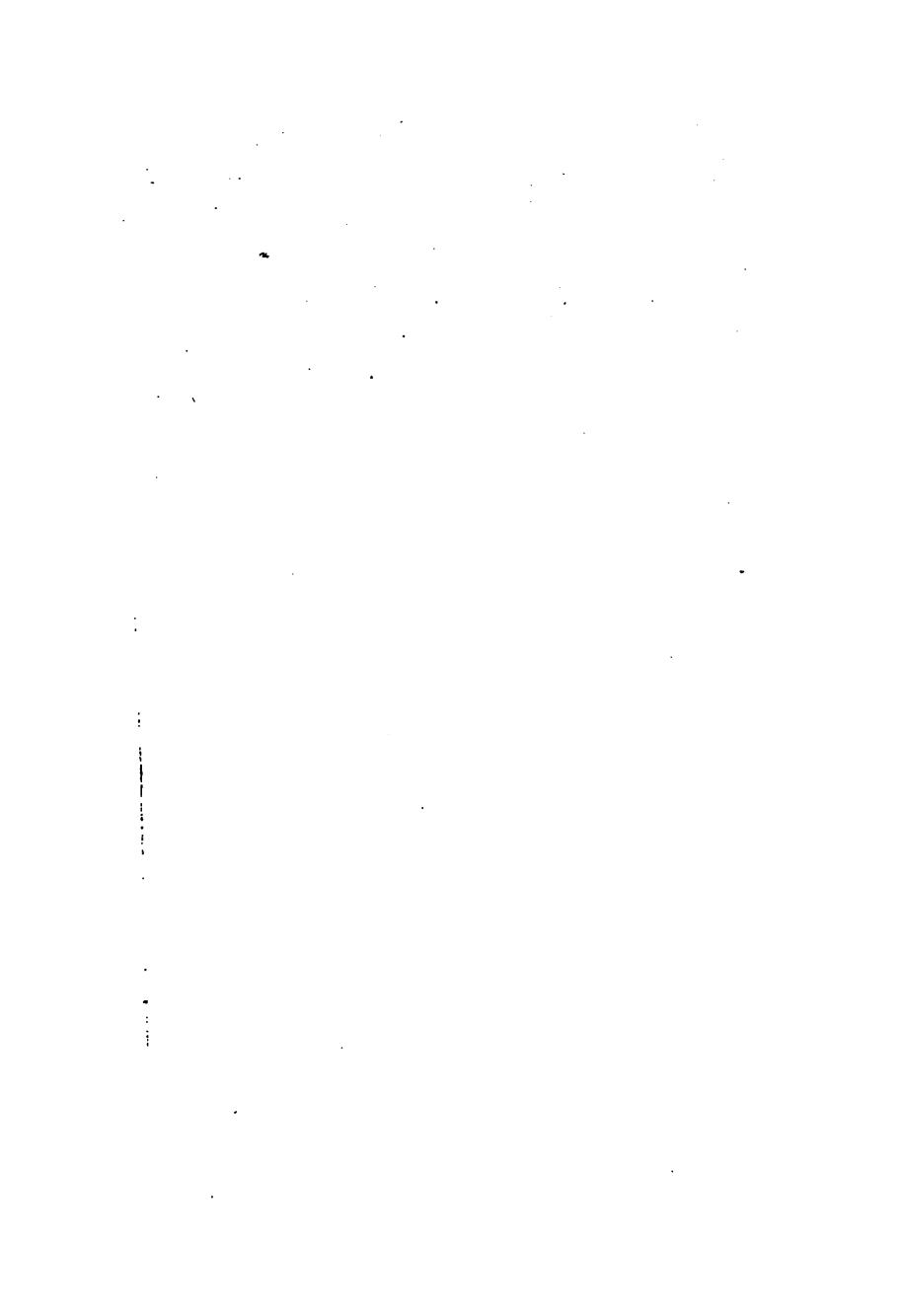


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HONEST MUNCHIN;

AND OTHER SKETCHES OF

Early Methodism in the Black Country.

WITH THE ROMANTIC STORY OF

THE LEEK-SEED CHAPEL.

"A poor woman of Darlaston, who had sworn that none should touch me, was knocked down and beaten, and would have been further ill-treated had not a man called to them, 'Hold, Tom, hold!' 'Who's there?' asked Tom. 'What, Honest Munchin? Nay, then, let her go.'"

Wesley's Journal.



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PREFACE.

THESE little sketches, based for the most part on real incidents, appeared originally in the columns of the *Methodist Recorder*. They are intended as simple illustrations of the trials and triumphs of early Methodism in the district now familiarly known as the "Black Country." In those days the latter term had a moral as well as a physical significance, but, thanks to the wholesome influence of the religious crusade, brighter days have dawned upon this busy hive of industry. The heroism of our forerunners ought to inspire us with a brave valour in support of the glorious truths for which they willingly endured so much persecution.

J. C. T.

February, 1871.

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HOW HONEST MUNCHIN SAVED THE METHODISTS.

A CENTURY ago there stood in a retired spot, within a stone's-throw of the High Bullen, at Wednesbury, an antiquated hostelry, known as the "Cockfighters' Arms," a great resort of the "cocking"

fraternity, for whose exploits Wednesbury was so famous in the days of auld lang syne. Here, after the excitement of the cock-pit, gamesters resorted to discuss the merits of their favourite birds, and to adjust the stakes they had severally lost or won. Here, too, were settled, amidst plentiful potations of spiced ale, programmes of future chanticleerian encounters. The exterior of the house was dingy enough. The windows were dark and heavy, the low old-fashioned porch was rapidly dissolving partnership with the main building, and the overhanging signboard—on which a brace of fighting birds in grievous art had long since melted into love, and become ethereal as to colour—creaked dismally in response to every gust of wind. Few sober-minded folk cared to cross the threshold of the “Arms”; for Nancy Neale, the hostess, was an Amazon whose salutation only the initiated had the courage to encounter.

On a dull autumn evening, about the middle of the last century, a group of toppers, well-known members of the “fraternity,” sat around Nancy’s broad oaken table, discussing the prospects of their favourite pastime.

"I'll tell thee what, lads," observed a corpulent bull-necked fellow, pet-named the 'Game Chicken,' out of compliment to his prowess, "if we don't put a stop to these ranting Methodys, as goes about preachin' and prayin,' there'll be no sportsmen left us by-and-by."

"That's well said, Chicken," chimed in another inveterate cocker, "Hosey" by name, as he lifted a huge pewter pot to his lips.

"Why," resumed Chicken, "just look what they've done for Honest Munchin! Whoever could ha' thought it? As gain a chap was Munchin as ever handled a bird, an' a pluckier cove to bet I never see."

"Aye, aye!" exclaimed the company, in a chorus of assent.

"But, la!" continued the first speaker, "jist behold him now, as funky as a turtle-dove, an' I b'lieve if he wor to see a cock die he'd want his pocket-handkercher to wipe his eyes."

A roar of laughter, which greeted this sarcastic hit, encouraged the speaker to proceed.

"Well, I was agoin to say, lads, as this John Wesley, as they calls him, is a-comin' to-morrow to preach agin Francis Ward's house, and we

oughter show him what sort o' blood there is in Wednesbury. What say you, Mr. Moseley?"

The person thus appealed to, although of superior mental training to any of his pot companions, was an inveterate gamester, and his air of shabby gentility intimated a luckless career. He had indeed had such a run of misfortune that a fine estate, which he had inherited on the borders of Wednesfield, was so hopelessly encumbered, and so stricken with poverty, as to be popularly known in the neighbourhood by the name of "Fighting Cock's Hall."

"Here," said the gamester, raising his fishy eyes and leering like an ogre, "here is a crown-piece, the last I have left, to buy a basket of stale eggs. Chicken'll know what to do with 'em."

"Aye, aye!" chimed in Nancy, who stood with folded arms against the door, "an' I'll give another, for these Methodys is for closing every tavern in Wedgebury, according to Munchin's talk; but we'll show um what stuff we're made on, won't we, Chicken?"

At this unexampled sacrifice for the cause of cocking and tippling the applause became

uproarious, and by general consent Mr. Wesley was to have such a reception on the morrow as would convince him that "Wedgebury blood was game." So inspiring became this lively theme that the morning sky was flushed with the red streaks of dawn before the revellers brought their orgies to a close.

On the afternoon following, the alley leading to the "Arms" was filled by a crowd of roysterers, headed by the Chicken and his *confrères* of the night before. The enthusiasm of the mob in their denunciation of the Methodists was heightened by sundry jugs of ale, liberally dispensed by Nancy. The multitude was composed of the lowest class of labourers, not a few of them being armed with sticks and staves. As the starting-time drew near, such eggs of the required antiquity as had been procured were distributed among the noisy multitude, the excitement rose yet higher, and at length vented itself in a song, common at that period, of which the refrain was—

"Mr. Wesley's come to town
To try and pull the churches down."

The preliminaries being now all settled, the throng, at a given signal from the Game

Chicken who led them, started on their evil errand. Marching through the High Bullen, on which the gory evidence of a recent bull-bait was still visible, they approached the modest-looking homestead of Francis Ward. As they neared the spot they found a vast assemblage of men, women, and children gathered round a venerable-looking man who was preaching to them in the open air. The preacher was John Wesley. His silver locks were waving in the breeze ; his eye glanced kindly on all around him ; and his voice, distinct and clear, was pleading, as for dear life, firmly yet tenderly, with the assembled crowd, not a few of whom were melted into tears. On either side of the great evangelist stood Honest Munchin and Francis Ward. The former drew Wesley's attention to the advancing mob, and the preacher suddenly raising his voice, and gazing earnestly at his assailants said, "My good friends, why is it that you wish to raise a rout and a riot ? If I have injured any man, tell me. If I have spoken ill of any, I am here to answer. I am come on an errand of peace, and not of warfare. Lay down your weapons. I am all

unarmed. I want to tell you something worth the hearing. Will you listen?"

All eyes were turned to the Chicken, who for a moment seemed abashed, and hesitated to give the word of command, but urged on by the jeers of his comrades, he gave the signal, and in a moment the frantic mob sent a volley of unfragrant missiles at the preacher and his supporters; and breaking through the ranks of the worshippers they rushed towards the temporary platform, overturned it, smashed the tables and chairs, hurling the fragments in all directions, and pursued Mr. Wesley (who had found refuge at Ward's house) with such violence as to endanger the safety of that domicile, and it was not until the preacher had quietly surrendered himself that they were in any degree restored to peace.

Making his appearance, with Ward and Munchin, at the door, Mr. Wesley asked what it was they wanted with him?

"You maun come along to the justice," roared the rabble in reply; and the echo was taken up again and again: "The justice! the justice!" Such few of Mr. Wesley's adherents as had the courage to stand by him in

this peril now flocked round him, and after a short conference with Ward, the preacher expressed his readiness to accompany the mob.

The justice to whom it was decided to convey Mr. Wesley was the Squire of Bentley, Lane by name, and a descendant of the famous Colonel Lane, who concealed and otherwise befriended the luckless King Charles II., during his romantic game of "hide and seek" with the Roundheads. It was quite dusk when the evangelist and his persecutors left Wednesbury on this strange pilgrimage. Munchin, Ward, and about a dozen other staunch Methodists, including three or four women in Quaker-like bonnets, were all the body-guard Mr. Wesley had, against the menacing mob of ruffians numbering three-score. Resistance was perfectly useless, and Munchin's remonstrances with his former companions, though often urged, were received with scoffs and jeers. In this extremity, without consulting Mr. Wesley, and confiding his secret only to one or two confederates, Munchin devised a scheme to damp the courage of the ringleaders of the fierce and insolent mob. During a short

pause at Darlaston, ordered by Chicken that he might quench his burning thirst for alcohol, Munchin was enabled to arrange the preliminaries of his ingenious device. After the lapse of a few minutes, the Chicken, who had evidently made the most of his time, came staggering down the steps of the White Lion, and the march was resumed. The night grew darker, a drizzling rain began to fall, and not a few of the mob, whose spirits had been damped, here turned back, but the rest quickened their pace towards Bentley.*

* The idea of going to the "justice" was a very natural one to the mob, since several summonses had already been issued against Mr. Wesley in various parts of the country, and divers rewards were offered to any one who could procure his conviction. The following is the text of one of the "Justices' papers" issued about this period:—

"STAFFORDSHIRE."

"To all high constables, petty constables, and others of His Majesty's peace officers within the said county.

"Whereas we, His Majesty's justices of the peace for the said county of Stafford, have received information that several disorderly persons, styling themselves Methodist preachers, go about raising routs and riots to the great damage of His Majesty's liege people, and against the peace of our lord the King;

"These are in His Majesty's name to command you, and every one of you, within your respective districts, to make diligent search after the said Methodist preachers, and to bring him or them before some of us, His Majesty's justices of the peace, to be examined according to their unlawful doings.

"Given under our hands and seals, this 12th day of October, 1743.

(Signed)

J. LANE.

W. PERSHOUSE."

In due time the pretty little village of Bentley was reached, and the crowd paced expectantly up the long avenue leading to the hall. Mr. Lane and his family, who kept good hours, had retired to rest, and were annoyed not a little at such an intrusion on their repose. Appearing at the window in undress, Mr. Lane shouted,—

“What means all this—~~eh?~~ get about your business.”

“An’ please your worship,” answered the Chicken, “we’ve got Mr. Wesley here, wot’s bin a prayin’ an’ a psalm singing at Wedgebury yonder, an’ makin’ a disturbance on the king’s highway, an’ please your worship what would you advise us to do?”

“To go home quietly,” rejoined the justice, “an’ get to bed,” with which judicial advice he fastened the window, and put an end to the conference.

At this unexpected rebuff the crowd grew clamorous, and were only silenced by the voice of Chicken, which bade them proceed with Mr. Wesley to Walsall, where a justice of later hours might be found, adding that he and his lieutenants would be with them presently.

The crowd, on hearing this, began slowly to retrace their steps down the gravel path, while Chicken, with two or three confidential comrades, sought to obtain another interview with the justice, thinking that when the mob had departed he might plead with his worship more successfully. Munchin, who was an attentive witness to this arrangement, withdrew unseen from Mr. Wesley's side, and was soon lost amongst the shadows of the dark beeches which skirted the hall. The Chicken tried in vain to rouse the somniferous justice a second time, and after trying the strength of his lungs and his patience until the case was hopeless, he went cursing and muttering away. Arm in arm, he and his three companions pursued the path taken by their confederates on before, with as quick a step as their previous libations would allow. The night was dark and still. Only the distant murmur of the onward mob disturbed the prevailing calm, save a faint breeze from westward which bore the silvery chimes of a distant church tower.

"That's ten by Will'nall clock, Chicken," remarked one of the group.

Chicken made no answer, but was felt to be

trembling from head to foot. At length he said with a spasmodic effort, pointing to the beeches,—

“O gracious heavens! what’s that?”

The other three turned their eyes in a moment to the spot, and saw in the dark shadow of the trees a tall figure, clothed in white, slowly advancing towards them. The four men then fell instinctively on their knees, and probably for the first time in their lives stammered out a prayer.

“The Lord preserve us, sinners as we are!” gasped the Chicken, and the others repeated the cry.

Still the figure slowly advanced, and their terror increased a thousandfold. They grew speechless and motionless. When within a few yards of them, the spectre paused, and lifting an arm beneath its snow-white shroud, it said, in a voice sepulchral, calling the Chicken by his real name,—

“Dan Richards, is that you who art become a persecutor of God’s saints?”

“The Lord preserve us, sinners as we are!” again groaned the Chicken with a violent effort, and fell back in a swoon.

"Amen!" gasped his three terrified comrades, in convulsive chorus.

The vision slowly disappeared without further parley, and the three men managed as well as they were able to restore their helpless leader. When he was at length able to walk, the four started as quickly as their trembling limbs would allow in the direction of Wednesbury, resolved on leaving the mob to fare as best they may.

"What a fearsome sight we've seen!" groaned the Chicken at intervals. "It will haunt me to my dying day."

"Cheer up, comrade; doant turn coward," urged his companions, who in truth were as fearful as their leader, starting at every object that they met along their dark and silent way.

Meanwhile, the mob had conveyed Mr. Wesley to Walsall, and as they were just ascending the hill leading into the town, Honest Munchin, to the glad surprise of his friends, who had not seen him since they left Bentley, again joined them. But Munchin kept the ghost affair a secret, save to the two or three already initiated; and carried the white sheet unperceived beneath his arm, rejoicing that

his knowledge of the superstitious fear of the Chicken and his companions had supplied him with an effectual means of victory over them.

On arriving at Walsall, no justice was to be found at home, and the mob, worn out by fatigue and disappointment, seemed half-resolved to let their captive free ; but urged on by a boisterous company just emerging from the cock-pit, who came flocking round, they commenced an uproar, a picture of which shall be given in Mr. Wesley's own words :—
“Many endeavoured to throw me down, well judging that if once on the ground, I should hardly rise any more, but I made no stumble at all, nor the least slip, until I was entirely out of their hands. Although many strove to lay hold on my collar or ~~clothes~~ to pull me down, ~~they~~ could not fasten at all, only one got fast hold of the flap of my waistcoat, which was soon left in his hand. The other flap, in the pocket of which was a bank-note, was but half torn off. A lusty man struck at me several times with a large oaken stick, with which one blow at the back of my head would have saved him all further trouble. But every time the blow was turned aside, I know not

how. Another raised his hand to strike, but let it drop, only stroking my head, exclaiming, "What soft hair he has!" A poor woman of Darlaston, who had sworn that none should touch me, was knocked down and beaten, and would have been further ill-treated, had not a man called to them, 'Hold, Tom, hold!' 'Who's there?' asked Tom. 'What, Honest Munchin? Nay, then, let her go.'"

The crowd now grew more furious, and stones and sticks were brought into such plentiful use that Wesley and his few brave followers were in the utmost peril, when suddenly the Chicken and his three companions who had retraced their steps, being conscience-stricken, appeared upon the scene once more.

"Hold! I say," roared the Chicken. "No more o' this, hold there!"

The voice was at once recognised, and produced an instant truce to battle.

Advancing to Mr. Wesley's side, the Chicken, who was deadly pale, shouted to his bewildered followers, "Now, lads, look ye here! the first as lays a finger on this gen'leman an' his friend, shall feel the weight o' this staff, I promise yer. We've all been a-doin' the devil's

work this day." Then turning to Mr. Wesley, he shook hands with him, and begged his forgiveness, and also grasped Munchin's fist with all the ardour of bygone years, little dreaming however that he was thus paying court to the veritable ghost he had seen at Bentley.

The influence of the Chicken's determined action was all-powerful. The uproar ceased. The mob, dispersing, wended homewards, and Mr. Wesley was conducted to a place of refuge. Never after were the Methodists troubled by the Chicken or his friends; but Munchin kept the ghostly stratagem almost wholly to himself, as a weapon of defence to be used whenever future occasion might require it. It never was required, and never will be now, and so I have not scrupled to disclose the secret of a hundred years, and to make known how Honest Munchin saved the Methodists.





WHAT METHODISM DID FOR HELL-LANE.

UNDER the shadow of the far-famed Sedgley Beacon, lined on either side with vestiges of exhausted coal mines and artificial volcanoes which have long since "paled their ineffectual fires," is a narrow, winding road, which for sufficient reason the early denizens of the Black Country used to call Hell-lane. Hard by are there strange localities, known by the equally suggestive names of Sodom, Gospel-end, and Catchem's-corner. Half a century ago these places were the positive terror of a district in which bull-baiting and cock-fighting were accounted innocent and harmless pastimes. Scenes of violence and bloodshed were not unfrequent in most if not all of

them, but Hell-lane certainly carried off the palm.

“Here vice her crimson folds around her spread,
And outraged virtue hung its blushing head.”

Of old Hell-lane there are few distinctive features left ; few relics of those strange adventurers whose exploits were well-nigh as romantic as those of dauntless Rob Roy. The disturbing influence of mining operations has shaken down most of the dark haunts of villainy, where, of old, plots were hatched and schemes laid to entrap unwary travellers by the levy of “black mail,” or the remorseless stroke of the bludgeon. A few noted haunts, however, still remain. At the entrance to the lane stands an antiquated hostelry of a nondescript style, yclept the Duke of York, a place which fifty years ago was the famous resort of a satanic brotherhood known as the “Hell-lane Gang.” A little further up the lane is a small brook bridge, almost as famous in the romance of crime as Sir Walter’s Brig o’ Turk. Near this bridge resided one Billy Moore, the Rob Roy of the village, at whose hands many a hapless passer-by has, like Nichol Jarvie, been toppled over into the stream below. The

only other relic of those strange days is an unpretending cot, once famed, like Alloway Kirk, as the place where

“Ghaists and howlets nightly cry.”

The annals of Hell-lane abound of course with wild legends and stories, one or two specimens of which, as related to us by “the oldest inhabitant,” we may be permitted to quote.

“Why, sir,” said our informant, “you can’t imagine what Hell-lane was like. It was a fearsome place, I do assure you. Nobody durst venture down it after nightfall, and even in broad daylight it was hardly safe. There were certain taverns where the ‘gang’ used to meet. There was the old Duke of York, and the old Barley Mow, as stood near by each other ; and the Bull’s Head where Trilly Riley got up bull-baits and badger hunts ; and Billy Moore’s by the brook ; and (but this was the worst of all) old Hell House. Dick Evans lived there, and being a great fighter there used to be a bit of sparring every night. Evans’ daughter, a big strapping wench, used to be second to one o’ the men, an’ when the fight was on, she would jump on the screen, and ~~show~~

to her favourite in a vulgar way, 'Give him a red shirt, my bonny boy!'

"Well, sir," continued our aged companion, "you may be sure we had a queer lot o' folk in such a place. We had both a witch and wizard. The witch was named Nelly Nichols, an' she lived not far from Billy Moore's. She was a little wiry-looking woman, with ferret eyes an' long bony fingers. Everybody bore fear of her, for she had marvellous power wi' spirits an' sich, and could tell all that had happened, and all that was to happen in the lane, no matter how dark things were kept. An' folk said she used to turn herself into a white rabbit, and go about the lane, after dark, prying into men's houses, so much that it used to be a regular thing when I was a lad to ask, 'Have you seen the white rabbit to-night?' One day, as she was in the form of a white rabbit stealing round to Billy Moore's back-door, Billy's black terrier caught her, and ate her up, and so there was an end of her.

"The wizard's name was Kat Rhodes. I remember him well. He used to go about wi' his hair hanging down in a sort of pig-tail,

and was dressed in red and yellow clothes. He was a fearsome fellow, an' if anybody offended him he would swear a great oath, an' some misfortune would be sure to follow. Either his enemies would be hurt in the pit, or some of their ill deeds would come to daylight and they get punished ; so you may be sure Kat Rhodes was feared and respected by every thief in the lane.

"Dick Ormes was another of the old folks. Dick had only one leg, and he lived in a cot with his dog, pig, and cow, and led a happy life. One night Dick found out a mystery. He was walking out late, an' saw a strange-looking being walking about, an' as he got close to it, he found it was a woman without a head! He looked at it in horror, but in a moment it passed away. Dick told the news, and the people watched night after night, until at length they saw it again, an' they found out from Nelly Nichols that it was the ghost of a woman that had been murdered by the Hell-lane Gang. Some time after, the ghost was seen to go to Dick's cot, and when the people followed to learn the news, they found the dog, pig, and cow had gone.

and poor Dick himself lay dead, with a pipe in his mouth.

“But, sir, would you believe we had a parson in Hell-lane? He was a strange one, sure enow. They called him Jack the Barber, he being a hair-cutter all the week an’ a preacher o’ Sundays. While he was hair-cutting or shaving he had all his thoughts on his sermons an’ such like, an’ he always spoke ‘a word in season’ to his customers. One day a stranger called to be shaved, so Jack lathered his face, held back his head, an’ just as he was beginning to scrape him wi’ the razor he said to the man, in a very solemn tone, ‘My good brother, are you prepared to die?’ The man looked hard ‘at Jack, still harder at the razor, an’ then rushed half terrified out of the shop, all lathered as he was, shouting out at the top of his voice, ‘Murder! murder!’ Jack followed at his heels, but could not catch him, an’ never saw his new customer again. Once, as I heard Jack preachin’ in the lane, he told us as how God made the white men an’ Satan the black, an’ when Satan’s work was finished, an’ he saw it was so much worse than t’other, he

grew savage, and struck the black Adam with his fist, flattening his nose an' thickening his lips, an' so the poor nigger has remained ever sin.' One day Jack told the flock he had faith enow to walk on water, and he went down to the Hell-lane canal, which had just been cut, and stepped in under the bridge, but being no swimmer, and the water deep, poor Jack got drowned."

These are but a few mild samples of the lore of superstition with which this remarkable locality once abounded, and in which, even to this day, a few of the old folks persistently believe. The whole place was a haunt of credulity and vice of the worst possible description, and the inhabitants were almost without exception such as the poet mourned over when he sang,—

"Wild as the untaught Indian's brood
The Christian savages remain."

Through long years darkness reigned with undisputed sway, and no flickering taper even of the light of truth flashed through the gloom. At length, however, the notoriety of Hell-lane attracted the attention of that renowned Irish missionary, Gideon Ouseley,

and he paid a visit to the place. He was horrified at the undisguised ignorance and crime which flaunted shamelessly before his eyes ; but the man, who had tutored the hearts of the wild Irish hordes in remote parts of Hibernia, was not to be daunted even by the threats of the Hell-lane Gang. The spot is still pointed out where the zealous missionary stood up to preach his first sermon there, to a wondering group of men and women upon whose ears the sound of worship never fell before. As he sang, and prayed, and preached, the influence of his words told perceptibly upon those who listened to his voice, and hearts were touched for the first time with the simple story of the cross. Encouraged by this success, Gideon resolved to make Hell-lane a mission station. Thieves and outcasts began one by one to attend the little room where the zealous missionary toiled unceasingly in the service of his Master, and the traces of his visit were like bread cast upon the waters, and seen after many days.

In course of time the little dark room gave way to a very primitive-looking chapel. "It

was a curious place," said an old Methodist to me the other day, "very plain outside, and within it had a little cockloft sort of gallery." The old place has of course long since disappeared, but it is remembered by many an aged Christian with delight, as the place where so many reforming influences were set in motion. No solemn-sounding bells invited men to worship there ; no " dim religious light " streamed through painted windows ; no candles shed their farthing ray upon a gilded altar ; no incense-laden air was breathed by the worshippers. Its excessive plainness would shock this ritualistic age. But in that simple village meeting-house, where the voice of Christian love was sweeter than swelling organ or belfry chime, and where the light of Christian truth blazed with richer beauty than mid-day tapers ever gave, or pictures of saints ever reflected, many of the Hell-lane outcasts were reformed, and with streaming eyes and breaking hearts, exclaimed in the presence of the great All-Father, "He brought me up out of the horrible pit, and out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings."



VERY LOW CHURCH.

THE quaintest of Dutch clocks ticks with solemn deliberation behind the door ; the quaintest of straight-backed chairs stands in the snug chimney corner ; and on the quaintest of mantels towers, amidst a profusion of crockery ornaments, a miniature grotto, whose two staid inmates, Jack and Joan, are reputed to be infallible on the subject of the weather. Seated in the straight-backed chair is the oldest inhabitant of our Staffordshire mining village, and as he smokes his calumet of peace, a pet tabby sits purring at his feet in supreme contentment.

“An’ so, sir, you want me to tell you how I comed to know anythin’ about the Methodys?” said the patriarch, having got his pipe into full blast. I nodded assent with

eagerness; the tabby turned her grey eyes full upon him, and purred in a softer key; the Dutch clock, even, to my fancy, seemed to subdue its voice, and I saw the head of Joan in a scarlet hood peeping with instinctive curiosity through the grotto door.

Deliberately as the clock, and in a voice grown tremulous with age, the oldest inhabitant began his story. The words came out with the whiffs, which so wreathed themselves in fantastic clouds about his silver head, that I could have fancied almost I was listening to the voice of good Haroun-al-Raschid.

"It 'll be five an' forty year ago come Tipton wake," he said, "if memory serves me, since I jined the Methodys, an' afore then I never knowed what th' inside of a chapel or a church was like. Ah, lad—sir, I mean," checking himself at the sight of my white neckerchief, "I wur a sad dog in them days. I reckon the bull-baitins at Wedgebuy yonder 'ud a come on badly without me, an' as for the Tipton wakes, why bless you, sir, I wur the very life and soul on 'em. The Methodys were the plague o' my younger days, for at every wake time they tried to stop our sport

wi' their psalm-singing and prayin', an' it often fell to my lot to put 'em down."

"An' how did you do that?" I interrupted.

"In various ways," he resumed with even more deliberation. "Duckin' 'em in the town pond by the green, peltin' 'em wi' rotten eggs, smashin' the windows o' the meetin'-house, an' such like. Ah! lad—sir, I mean,—I wur a sad dog in them days, probably the best soldier in the devil's regiment."

The tabby ceased purring at this confession, and Joan emerged yet further from the grotto.

"But what set me agin the Methodys more than ever was the goin's on o' one of 'em who worked with me in our pit. He wur an old man when I wur in my prime. They called him Honest Munchin, and I b'lieve he was one who defended Wesley in the Darlaston riot."

"Indeed!" I exclaimed, to relieve the pause which followed. It was a longer pause than usual, and the old man's thoughts seemed even to forsake his pipe.

"Ah, I shall remember Munchin to my dyin' hour. He was a torment to me in my

wickedness, but he came to be my spiritual father."

"How did he torment you?" I asked.

"That's just the curious point I'm comin' to," he answered. "You must know that Munchin wur a sad dog himself in his young days, an' used to persecute the Methodys, but a chance word from a sermon preached by Wesley on the Bullen pierced his heart, and the lion became a lamb. And a lamb he was ever after, though never shrinking from his duty. He was one o' the preachers I helped to duck in the pond by the green. We soused him again an' again, filled his mouth with mud, tore his coat from his back, an' left him in the street more dead than alive. An' yet, b'lieve me, next time we met he wur as gentle as ever, an' told me he forgave me all I'd done. *That's* what knocked me under. I could ha' stood a blow or a cursin', or anythin' else from him, but I couldn't stand that. His kindness heaped coals o' fire on my head, as the good Book says. I felt abashed at him after that. I couldn't bear to look him in his kind, honest face, b'lieve me. Yet I grew hardened in vice, and behind Munchin's back I jeered about

him, and devised all sorts of mischief against him. He used to spend a part of every dinner hour in private prayer. Stealing to a quiet corner of the mine, he would be praying while we were blurting oaths and ribaldry. Once we agreed to go an' pounce on him in his prayin' place, and make sport of him. I was to be leader. So I went first softly on tip-toe, and presently I heard his voice. I stopped an' listened, an' b'lieve me, lad—sir, I mean,—I heard him a prayin' for me, and all the rest, by name. I could go no further. That knocked me under quite, *that* did. So I turned back and made the rest come with me. He was like Daniel in the lions' den. We was the lions, but, b'lieve me, that prayer had left us no teeth or claws to devour him with, so to speak. When we'd got about half-way back to where our dinner-cans were left, a dull thumping sound almost deafened us, and the little glimmer o' light from the shaft went clean out. For a moment we was dumb-founded. At length one said, 'It's a fall o' rock ahead on us, lads, and we're buried alive.' He was right, too. A huge body of rocky earth had given way, and we were blocked in with-

out any present means of escape. Our tools were, as ill-luck would have it, by our dinner-cans on the other side of the blockade. In a moment rose a wild yell of despair from all of us together, and it rang like a death-knell through the workin's."

The old man was warming with his subject, waxed almost eloquent, and became so absorbed that he laid his pipe on the ledge in the chimney corner to smoke itself out, at which unusual proceeding tabby gazed harder than ever, and Joan ventured yet further from the grotto.

"A voice in the darkness said, 'What cheer, comrades?' But we only answered by another yell. It was Munchin's voice; and presently he groped his way to where we stood. Munchin soon found out the strait we was in, but he was as calm as a dove an' as brave as a lion. 'Lads!' he said, 'we must work, an' trust in the Lord to save us.' His courage was wonderful, and we clung to him as our deliverer. 'Lads,' he said, with a voice as kind as a mother's, 'this is a serious time, an' we want all the help we can get. You've often heard me speak of One who is mighty

to save. Suppose I ask Him to save us now ?' We was all down on our tremblin' knees in a twinklin', but, bless you, lad—sir, I mean,—I felt as how Munchin might as well ha' prayed for the old serpent himself as pray for me ; but I knelt beside him, tremblin' in every limb, and so did the rest, as this dear good saint of God lifted up his voice to heaven. What a prayer that was, surely ! I had never heard a prayer o' that sort before, an' I have never heard one to match it since. He told the Lord what sad rebels we was (he put himself among the number), an' then he spoke about the thief upon the cross, an' the prodigal son, an' he made it out as plain as A B C that though we all was so wicked that hell was almost too good for us, yet that the Lord wouldn't cast us off if we'd only come to Him. I could hardly believe it at first, even when Munchin prayed it, but somehow, as he went on, all my sins seemed to come rolling up before me mountains high, and I grew more afeered o' them than I was o' the livin' grave we were kneelin' in ; but Munchin went on, and I felt as though that mountain o' sin was sinking me into the earth, and I cried out,

‘Lord, save me! Lord, save the worst sinner out of hell!’ an’ presently”—here the old man grew so fairly excited that he got up from his chair and took both my hands in his—“presently the mountain rolled away, and I felt so happy here, here, sir,”—thumping his breast—“as I’d never felt before.”

The old man stopped from sheer exhaustion, and I led him back to his seat. This was the longest pause of all, and I saw that tears were chasing each other down his wrinkled face.

“When Munchin had done prayin’, I quite forgot for a minute or two all about the fall o’ rock, but he urged us on to work as well as we could, without any tools save such stones as we could find by groping in the dark. Aye, it was weary, hopeless work, but I was so happy that I could a’most sing. We toiled at it all that night and far into the next day, when hunger tamed us down, and we could work no longer. Laying us down in a sort of half-stupor, for I know not how long, we prepared for the worst. With what little strength I had left I tried to repeat Munchin’s prayer, and that revived me even yet. Pre-

sently the sound of picks an' men's voices gave us hope, but we was too far gone to speak till they fairly broke in upon us, and carried us one by one to the 'sump.' Then they gave us a drop o' brandy to revive us, and it brought us all round again in time. An' now they were for haulin' us up the shaft, at the top o' which they said our wives and children were a'most wild to see us—my wife and only child are both in heaven now; but Munchin eyed me wi' a look I understood, and I said, 'Lads, we'll thank the Lord for this deliverance.' The men who had rescued us thought me wondrous changed, but they said nought, and we all knelt down while Munchin prayed as beautiful as before. An' so, lad—sir, I mean,—I've been a Methody ever since, and a Methody I hope to die."

The Dutch clock striking at this moment reminded me of the hour, and after thanking the old man for his story, I rose to take my leave.

"You're welcome to it all, I'm sure," he said, "for it does me good to tell the old story. It often makes me wish we'd got more Munchins now," he added. "An' when I hear of

High Church parsons quarrelling about the cut and colour of their—of their——”

“Vestments,” I suggested.

“Aye,” he continued, “I was going to say petticoats. When I hear this, I often think o’ my first Methody service in a cathedral o’ God’s own making, down under ground—they’d call it Low Church, I reckon?”

“Very,” I assented.

“But it was both Low Church an’ High Church to me. It was low when it sunk me down beneath the weight of sin, an’ it was high when it lifted me up to the arms of Jesus. Aye, an’ dark as it was, we’d no need o’ candles to find the way to heaven. No! blessed be God!

‘Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature’s night,
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray;
I woke: the dungeon flamed with light.
My chains fell off, my heart was free;
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee!’”

Tabby was fast asleep by this time, and Joan had come so far from the grotto as to suggest the idea that she contemplated suicide over the mantel.

“Good-bye, lad—sir, I mean,” said the

oldest inhabitant, grasping my hand with much heartiness, "Good-bye, an' a pleasant journey homeward. There'll be fair weather to-night, for I ha'nt seen Joan so far ahead for weeks. Good-bye !"





EFFIE'S FIRST SERMON.

A DIM taper-light was burning in the chamber of death, and its fitful glimmer seemed to intensify the aspect of poverty and discomfort which reigned within those four bare garret walls. On a bed of straw lay the spare form of a woman in the last stage of lingering disease, and kneeling over her, clad in a bundle of dirty rags, was her only child, a girl of seventeen winters (she seemed to have missed the summer-time of life), pale, pensive-looking, and prematurely old.

"Mother! dear mother, are you better now?" The voice trembled with emotion, and the whole frame of the speaker shook as she put her ear to the mouth of the sufferer to catch the faintest whisper of reply. The sluggish moments rolled on wearily, but no answer came.

"Mother! dear mother! are you better now?" There was a tone bordering on anguish in this second cry. A movement of the glassy eyes, a slight twitching of the blue, thin lips, indicated that the dying woman was about to make an effort to reply. Effie bent down again to hear.

"I—shall—be—better—soon," she faintly whispered in long and painful pauses, "better—soon, in heaven!"

"O mother, don't say that!" cried Effie. "I cannot think that God is kind, as you used to tell me, if He takes you from me."

A look of displeasure, like a momentary cloud, overspread the serene and happy face of the sufferer. Effie knew its meaning, and as she kissed the pale and shrunken cheeks, and stroked back the silver hair, her warm tears fell upon the couch of straw. Some moments passed before another word was spoken.

"Effie," gasped the dying one, in feebler accents than before, "bring—him—here—your father!"

There was such a tone of command in this request that Effie, reluctant as she was to leave

the chamber, dare not hesitate to enter upon her hopeless errand ; and, pulling her ragged garments tightly round her, she was threading her way in another moment through the crowded and noisy market-place of a large Black Country town.

Vanity fair was at its highest pitch, and the motley crowds seemed almost bewildered by the number and variety of "sports" presented. Here were dancing girls on stilts ; yonder a set of merry-go-rounds. Clowns with painted faces were uttering ribald jests, and mountebanks were twisting their lithe limbs into shapes grotesque. For the rest there were bear and badger baits, and a huge cock-pit at the rear of the "Rodney" tavern was crowded to suffocation. Into the midst of this Babel Effie managed, with some dexterity, to find her way, heedless of the scenes around her, with eyes blind to all but the object of her search, and with a heart dead to all save the scene of suffering she had left behind her in the lonely chamber. The young wanderer had grown wearied and hopeless in her search, and was about to retrace her steps, when, amidst the confusion of tongues which pre-

ailed in the market-place, she heard the voice of singing, and as she paused to listen, the sound grew nearer and nearer, and presently a slowly-moving crowd emerged from a by-street and went in solemn procession to the centre of the fair. As this handful of godly folk sang with earnest voice a hymn of praise, the clowns hurled their coarsest jests at the singers, the dancing-girls shrieked out their wildest laughter, and a jeering crowd, mocking the hymn tune, began to sing,—

“Mr. Wesley’s come to town
To try to put our pastimes down,”

while a few of the more adventurous hurled stones and sticks at the leaders of the band. A great shout of laughter arose from the crowd when one of the tormentors hurled a dead cat high in the air just as Mr. Wesley was commencing his address. Effie, who had almost unconsciously followed the crowd, recognised in this last miscreant her father, raving in the fury of his drunken madness. She almost fled towards him, and rushing into his arms fairly shrieked,—

“O father, she’s dying,—mother’s dying!”
and she burst into convulsive sobs.

For an instant the reeling drunkard seemed too surprised to answer, but presently, with a horrible oath, he struck the child with his clenched fist, and laid her senseless and bleeding on the ground. A cry of "Shame!" from his own comrades assailed him, and he beat a cowardly retreat into the crowd behind. A good Samaritan was not wanting to poor Effie. One of the Methodist leaders—Francis Ward by name, whose pious memory is treasured in Wednesbury to this day—lifted the pale and death-like form, restored its consciousness, and bore her tenderly to the chamber of her dying mother. It was not the first visit of this good saint of God to that lowly chamber. All that Effie's mother ever knew of hope beyond the grave, Francis Ward had taught her. But never had his labours been so blest as on this night when the feeble lamp of her life was flickering. In praise and prayer, and cheering words of promise and hope divine, these three "their sacred vigils kept" until the midnight hour. One was absent then. A weeping daughter knelt by the bedside kissing, with all the passion of early grief, the hand of her mother, icy with the chill of death, and a

good man beside her was praying audibly,
"Thy will be done."

* * * * *

Another year rolled by, and Wednesbury wake-time had come again. In the low-browed "Rodney" tavern were assembled, as usual at such seasons, a group of tipsy revellers. Effie's father was of the number, and the talk turned, as it often did, on the doings of the "Methodies." This man was more profuse in oaths and blasphemies than ever, and he wound up an invective tirade by declaring that "Them fellows made a fool o' my poor woman, and now they've made a fool o' my silly wench, but mark me, George, they'll never make a fool o' me."

The evening wore on, and by-and-by, within a stone's-throw of the "Rodney," another company had assembled in a primitive meeting-house. Effie was of the number, and the talk of this group was of Him before whom the powers of darkness tremble, and who keepeth the feet of His saints. Francis Ward was there, and his talk was heavenly. We, in these days of modern Methodism, seldom, I fear, experience the joy of such a lovefeast as

that was. There had been some glorious emancipations from the thralldom of Satan, and those who had been warriors in sin were become not less valiant in righteousness. O what thrilling experience was theirs ! What shouts of triumph rang in that heaven below !

The lovefeast was just concluding when there was a noise without. Jeers and threats, blasphemous parodies of hymns and prayers, were followed by a loud knocking at the door, and in a moment a host of revellers had burst their way into the building. The worshippers, not unused to such scenes of violence, were calm, and offered no resistance. Effie, glancing at the ringleader, recognised her father, and as Francis Ward was about to speak she stopped him by a whisper, and rose herself to face the foes. Had a vision appeared to these rough, rude revellers, they could not have been more dismayed and silenced than by the presence of this fair young girl confronting them with mild reproving eyes, and asking attention while she spoke. There was dead silence in a moment. Then she began in gentle words and silvery tones to speak. The men who

had come to do deeds of violence grew cowards as her voice assailed them, and one by one they laid their weapons down, and composed themselves to hear her through. The little meeting-house never had such a congregation before, and the girl-preacher was so



rare a novelty that she seemed to cast a spell over the listening throng. But it was not till she came to tell her own experience that the full force of her simple words was felt, and most of all her father, who, slinking into a corner, had tried to elude her glance, fairly broke down when she told of her mother's

last words, and the glorious lovefeast they had together on the night she died. She said nothing of her father's crime and cruelty, but this loving forgetfulness goaded him much more than the bitterest words she could have spoken. Then she spoke with a touching candour of the depths of sin into which so many had fallen in the orgies and revellings of that very wake-time; and when she had painted sin the blackest, she drew the shining picture of the cross, and spoke of the dying thief as an instance of the nearness of the sinner to the Saviour. Stretching out her arms in impassioned earnestness, she sang, accompanied by her comrades:—

‘Come, O my guilty brethren, come,
Groaning beneath your load of sin;
His bleeding heart shall make you room,
His open side shall take you in.’

The effect was wonderful. Tears stole unbidden down the cheeks of those unused to weep, and the lions were turned into lambs. Francis Ward exclaimed in triumph: “The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and a little child shall lead them. How are those words fulfilled this day!”

This was Effie's first sermon. She preached many afterwards, and won many souls for Christ ; but no convert she made gave her so much satisfaction as the leader of that godless band, who on the next Sabbath was heard repeating, amidst triumphant tears,—

“My God is reconciled,
His pardoning voice I hear,
He owns me for His child,
I will no longer fear ;
With confidence I now draw nigh,
And ‘ Father, abba Father ! ’ cry.”





THE SQUIRE'S PULPIT.

UP a dingy court, in a suburb of B—, as sombre-looking as the parent town, there stood at the close of the last century a little structure, so quaint and primitive as to be conspicuous even among a group of homesteads that were wholly innocent of design or plan. Of these homesteads, some thrust as it were a leg or an arm menacingly into the street, and others were so retired as to suggest Dickens' idea that they had been playing "hide and seek," and had lost themselves. The specimen of architecture now particularly referred to was in the centre of the village, and was approached from the main thoroughfare by a tortuous passage along narrow courts, under frowning entries, and past an array of back doors, suggestive of squalid

homes where anything but "mirth and hospitality might reign." Across this narrow gullet cords were stretched at frequent intervals, and so constantly from one or other were linen garments flaunting in the breeze, that the court seemed doomed to the horrors of a perpetual washing-day. Towards the end of the gullet were two wash-houses in close proximity, and stretching across them from roof to roof was an improvised chamber, evidently the work of amateurs. It was mainly of wood, all sorts of old boards variously painted, and two or three strangely disproportioned window-frames being pressed into the service. It was approached by a rickety flight of wooden steps without a handrail, and so imperfect in general construction as to demand the utmost circumspection to ensure a successful ascent. Yet was this "upper room" often typical of that grand chamber in Jerusalem which was filled with the glory of the Pentecostal host, for it was the resort of a godly little band of Wesley's converts, who day by day and night by night, in their hard-earned moments of leisure, held sweet counsel together, and exulted in the mercy of a new-

found Saviour. Methodism was no religion for ease-lovers in those days. In a worldly point of view, its professors had nothing to gain, but everything to lose by it. It was essentially the religion of the poor, and to embrace it involved not merely the jeers of comrades and fellow-workmen, but also the tyranny of masters. Religiously, however, there was an advantage in all this. The early converts who embraced the faith were, to say the least, sincere, and their trials and persecutions developed a heroism to which the world failed to render the homage it deserved. The little band worshipping in this quaint old meeting-house shared the general experience. The women were laughed at for their demure manners and Quaker-like attire, and the men were jeered by the ruddy-faced Boniface at the end of the court as "simpletons who had abjured strong drink and cock-fighting, and rebels who had set themselves up against the State Church."

Nor were the opposing villagers content with words. They carried their persecution even to the length of physical force. Stones and mud were hurled at the frail temple with

such violence as to threaten its overthrow; sparrows were craftily introduced through shattered panes, and their shrill chirping within was the signal for boisterous hilarity among the noisy blasphemers without. On one occasion the staircase was removed bodily during the meeting hour, and the whole court was mightily entertained at the sight of staid Methodist matrons leaping into the arms of brawny leaders waiting below to catch them in their precipitate descent.

On a chill winter's evening, soon after this latter escapade, the little company was again assembled in the place of prayer, and despite the cold blasts which pierced the chamber through and through, and made the boards and casements tremble, they felt their hearts burn within them, for they had the Master present there. When the meeting was over, a pious sister of the flock suggested the need of a new chapel. Nobody could doubt the urgency of the need, but how were the funds to be raised? "There is but one in this village," said a brawny son of Vulcan, "that has much wealth, and he's my master."

"Aye, aye, Squire W——, the ironmaster,

you mean, I reckon," rejoined the good sister; "but he's a Churchman to the backbone."

"You're right," said a third, "an' he can't abear the name o' Methodist. My Methodism lost me a good job last week. I work for him, and hearing I came to this chapel, he put some better castings out of my way, and give 'em to a worse workman, though I say it."

It was the general opinion that little help need be hoped for from the squire, and the discussion was just about to close without any result, when a young sister, who had not spoken before, suggested in a sweet bashful voice—

"Suppose we ask God about it? The hearts of all men are in His hands, and He can make even Squire W—— our friend."

There was of course a general concurrence in this suggestion, and the elder sister, who was especially elated by this new idea, added—

"Yea, and suppose we all agree to enter our closets during the dinner hour to-morrow, and at the same time, though in separate places, ask for the same blessing."

The resolution was not only agreed to, but faithfully carried out by every one of the pious company. Many a time and oft, besides, had they entreated Him "who dwelleth in the highest heavens," to dispose the heart of Squire W—— to this good work. It is no flight of fancy, but the sober truth, to say this prayer was heard.* To those earnest pleadings there came an answer immediate and effectual, as the sequel will show.

A few days after, this solemn compact the first travelling preacher came to Wednesbury Circuit, of which in those days this village formed a part. He met the society in the quaint meeting-house down the narrow court, and a glorious time they had! Strange enough in contrast was the experience of those brethren and sisters in Christ, all of whom, either by a telling sermon of Wesley's on the Bullen, an eloquent oration of Whitefield's on Bromwich Heath, or a faithful fireside talk by Honest Munchin or Francis Ward, had found the path which leads "from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God."

* The substance of this narrative was communicated to the writer by the son of the "elder sister" referred to.

The experiences of each (would that I had a record of them!) were closed at last ; the hymn commencing,

“God is the refuge of His saints,
When storms of sharp distress invade,”

had been heartily sung, and the benediction fervently pronounced. Still the company was loth to move. The secret at length came out, and the new minister was asked his advice. He heard the whole story, and promised to see Squire W—— on the morrow, remarking, “I will trust to your faith and prayer for full success.”

The squire lived at a stately house just outside the village. A long avenue of spreading beeches led from the main road to the entrance door. Through more than one pleasant vista Squire W—— could see from the window of his wainscoted parlour the ironfoundry which was both the source of his wealth and the acme of his ambition. It was his daily boast that he could produce more excellent iron castings than any rival in the three kingdoms. And it was no vain boast either.

The Methodist preacher was not unac-

quainted with the character of the squire, for more than one of the little Methodist flock were workers at the foundry, and they had given him several useful hints before he set out on his vague and uncertain mission. He sauntered up the avenue with all the ease and dignity of a state parson, and felt no trepidation when a footman, in yellow buttons and a powdered wig, ushered him into the awful presence of the squire.

"Squire W——, I presume," said he, with a polite bow.

"The same, at your service," gruffly answered the squire.

"I hear, sir," said the preacher, "that you're an ironfounder of great repute, and that you can produce most marvellous things in malleable."

The squire looked pleased, but said nothing.

"Now, what I have come to ask," continued the preacher, "is whether you think it would be possible to make a cast-iron pulpit?"

"Aye, that it would," said the squire, after a momentary surprise at the strangeness of the idea; "a pulpit, yea, and a parson too, for that matter, as parsons go now-a-days."

"Well then," resumed the preacher, half smiling, "I'll give you an order for a pulpit, if you'll accept my terms of payment."

"Cash at three months?" suggested the squire.

"No, sir; no cash at all,—but the loving gratitude of some of your workmen for many a year, and——"

The squire interrupted. "Are you one o' them Methody parsons?"

"I am," said the preacher.

The squire started from his seat, muttering some unintelligible words in an undertone, and paced up and down the room for some moments in evident agitation. At length, turning to his visitor, he said, not without emotion—

"Call this day week, my friend, and I will answer thee."

True to the appointment, the preacher and the squire were, after the lapse of seven days, closeted together in the wainscoted parlour. The squire was again much excited, and he made no attempt to conceal it.

"I'll tell thee what it is, friend," he said, after a cordial greeting. "I've had no peace for

these three weeks owing to you Methodists I used to persecute 'em, but now I find they're the best and steadiest o' my men. I used to scoff at them, but now I find their zeal for God puts my poor service all to shame. And now wherever I am something seems to be ever saying to me, 'Build 'em a chapel.' If I'm in the foundry, it's 'Build 'em a chapel.' If I'm in my parlour, it's 'Build 'em a chapel.' Even when I was driving the vicar in my carriage to Squire Anson's at Bentley the other day, I could hear something knocking at my heart, 'Build 'em a chapel.'"

"That seems very odd to you, no doubt," said the preacher, "but it isn't at all strange to me."

"Why not?" asked the squire.

Whereupon the preacher told him all the story of those earnest prayers, and the very day and hour of their offering tallied with the first moments of his uneasiness and his conviction.

"I've had a pulpit cast," said the squire, "and very beautiful it looks; but when we were all admiring it, my best workman, who is a Methodist, said to me, 'A pulpit's of no

use, master, without a building to put it in,' and this reminded me again of that strange call to duty ; and so, Churchman as I am, I mean to build you Methodists a chapel."

Aye, and a noble chapel he did build, too ! The cast-iron pulpit was excellent, and the building was made to match. One of the opening services the squire attended. He went, as he confessed, more to see how the chapel, and especially how the cast-iron pulpit, looked, than from any other motive. But the preacher for the day happened to be one of his own workmen, and out of curiosity he listened to every word. The truth came home to him. He wept like a little child. And when, at the close of the service, penitent sinners were invited to come and prostrate themselves before Christ, and in view of the whole congregation, Squire W—— was of the number, nor did he leave that house of prayer until he could sing with fervour—

" O happy day that fixed my choice
On Thee, my Saviour and my God !
Well may this glowing heart rejoice,
And tell its raptures all abroad.
Happy day ! happy day !
When Jesus washed my sins away !"

Squire W—— was proud of many of his achievements in iron manufacture, but he used to say that no specimen of his ware yielded him so rich a profit as that cast-iron pulpit he gave to the Methodists.





BARBARA'S LEGACY.

"BARBARA," said little Alec, "what a very old Bible yours must be!"

"Yes, Alec, it's an old Bible, sure enow," rejoined Barbara, as she sat wiping her spectacles; "but pray what put such an idea into your little head?"

"Why," answered Alec, glancing as he spoke at the well-worn volume on the window-sill, "it looks so brown and faded outside, and the leaves are all so yellow, and—and I've heard grandpa' say Mr. Wesley wrote his name in it ever so long ago."

We were seated—Barbara, Alec, and I—in the old woman's cottage, on the outskirts of what is still called, by a strange misnomer, Tipton Green, and through the little diamond panes of the window we could see the wood-

crowned height enfolding the ruins of Dudley's once famous castle. The cottage had a clean and pleasant look about it, but its scanty furnishing told that Barbara was poor. And Barbara *was* very poor, although, unlike many in her station, she never paraded her poverty. A happy face, though age had wrinkled it, was Barbara's, and not the wealthy iron lord, whose equipage made a clatter in the street during our quiet talk, had on the whole a happier life than this good Methodist woman of threescore years and ten.

"Aye, aye, little Alec," rejoined the old woman after a pause, "it's an old Bible; as you say, and Mr. Wesley's name is in it, but how I got it and why I treasure it would be a long tale to tell."

"O *do* tell it, Barbara," pleaded little Alec; and I, who had come to glean from the old woman some grains of Methodist lore, supported the plea, and secretly drew out my pocket-book to chronicle the wished-for story.

Barbara smiled without replying, and motioned to me to pass her old Bible. Turning to the fly-leaf, she sat looking at the faded yellow autograph for some time in

silence. The inscription was written in a bold, plain hand : " John Wesley, 1767. He delivereth me from mine enemies ; yea, thou liftest me up above those that rise up against me ; thou hast delivered me from the violent man."

As Barbara sat looking at it, a flood of olden memories seemed to stream upon her ; and I know not how long the pause might have remained unbroken had not little Alec in his childish impatience pleaded once more.

" O do, please, tell us the story, Barbara." Then the old woman's wandering thoughts came back again, and in a low voice, as if talking to herself rather than to us, she told us how she came to possess the only treasure that she prized on earth.

" In the days when Mr. Wesley came a-preaching round these parts, there were a number o' wicked men called bullots, and——"

" Barbara," interrupted little Alec, " what do you mean by bullots ? " And, to tell the truth, I was equally ignorant on the subject.

" You've heard o' bull-baiting, I reckon ? " asked Barbara, smiling at Alec's innocence.

" O yes, Barbara," rejoined Alec, " indeed I

have, and I have heard grandpa' say how the bulls used to toss little dogs up in the air, and how——"

"Well, then," resumed Barbara, stopping him, "a bullo was a man who used to take care of the bulls, and tie them to the stake to be baited. My poor father was a bullo once."

Alec looked half reverently at the daughter of such a hero of the old times, but he kept silence.

Barbara continued. "On a certain wake-time in Tipton, when the bulls were bellowing, and the bears were growling, and the cocks were crowing, and crowds of wicked men and wicked women were swarming like bees on Tipton Green, Mr. Wesley, attended by three or four pious Methodists from Wednesbury, marched right through the crowd to the horse-block, on which he stood up and began to speak."

"What is a horseblock, Barbara?" again interrupted little Alec, whose interest in the story was fast increasing.

"Why," explained the old woman, "when I was young, and there were no railroads, the gentry used to ride horseback, an' their ladies

rode behind them on a kind of double saddle, called a pillion, an' in every market-place there was a block of wood about a yard high and three or four yards square. Steps led up to it, and it was here that the gentlemen and ladies used to mount their horses. This was called a horseblock, on many a one of which Wesley used to preach."

Alec having expressed himself satisfied with the explanation, Barbara resumed.

"Well, as I was saying, Wesley mounted the horseblock on Tipton Green, and began to preach to the ranting, roaring crowd o' revelers. He told them of the sin o' cruelty, an' the sin o' drunkenness, an' the sin o' blasphemy, an' how God was angry wi' the wicked every day. At this the crowd began to bawl and blaspheme afresh, an' when the few pious folk near the horseblock started a tune, the rest began to mock in chorus a blasphemous hymn, until they drowned the voices of the psalm-singers; while one of the boldest of the miscreants began to pelt Mr. Wesley with stones an' mud. My poor father was one of the leaders of the mob, an' he was a party to a conspiracy that had been got up to handle Mr. Wesley

more roughly yet. On the borders o' the Green, nigh where you see those great anchor works (the old lady pointed as she spoke to the giant forges of Pershouse Parkes), there was in those days a horsepond, in which it had been arranged to 'duck the parson,' then a very common sport among the wicked crew. My poor father was to give the signal for attack when the mob had got fully incensed against the good servant of the Lord. It needed but the lifting of a finger to turn a host of hell-hounds on the leader of that godly band, but, to everybody's wonder, my father made no sign. Standing by the horse-block, he had heard a word or two of truth that pierced his heart like steel, an' he stood trembling for very fear, and he felt too great a coward to do the devil's work."

"A good sort of cowardice, that," I remarked.

"You're right there, sir," resumed Barbara, "but he had a worse sort o' cowardice at the same time."

"What was that?" I inquired.

"Why, sir, he was afraid to show the white feather before his evil comrades, and for a

while the struggle within him was so fierce that it seemed uncertain which way he would turn at last. But after a little while a mad-brained bullock, named Hosey, seeing my poor father hesitating, gave the signal, and the furious mob was all aroused to action. It was now or never with poor father. For a moment he looked on the mob as it drew nearer, and then, to the wonder of everybody, he jumped on the horse-block, and, standing in front of Mr. Wesley, he flourished a stick of gnarled oak, such as the bullocks always carried, and vowed vengeance on the first man who dared to draw nigh. The mob was taken aback at this, an' as for Hosey, he seemed struck dumb. 'Come on if you dare,' shouted my father, 'but the first as lays a finger on this honest man shall feel the weight o' my bullock-stick'—and he flourished it right well. 'For you know, lads,' he went on, 'it's agin our rules to strike a man until we hear what he's got to say for himself.' At this many o' my father's friends, drunk as some of them were, set up a cheer, an' even Hosey shouted, 'Well, old comrade, that sounds like John Bull, an' I'm willin' for one to hear what the

gen'leman's got to say.' At this Mr. Wesley stepped forward on the horse-block, an' spoke to them in such a sweet an' gentle voice that some of their hard hearts were quite melted, an' as for my father, the tears began to trickle down his dear honest face. But Hosey was unmoved, an' he kept nudging his followers an' saying, 'Now, lads, don't take on like children,' glancing as he spoke to my father and others who were moved by the tender, touching words of the evangelist. Hosey saw that his chance was fast going, an' he prepared to make a dash. My father was quite as determined to defend Mr. Wesley. Then the trial of strength began. Hosey and his followers, armed wi' mud, stones, dead cats, rotten eggs, an' the like, made a rush forward. My father put his strong arm in Wesley's, and led him through the surging multitude. He had, too, brave followers and defenders. The fight was short but fierce, Hosey and my father being what you may call the generals. They conveyed Mr. Wesley to my father's house, but by the time he reached it his silver wig was torn away, and his coat was covered with dirt and egg-stains from collar to flap. But for

the brave arms of my father's comrades he would have had some broken bones, no doubt. The mob then surrounded the house, smashed in the window-panes, and even tried to strip the roof, which they would have done, but that one of their leaders fell from a top window-sill, and hurt himself badly. Meanwhile Mr. Wesley and his brave defenders were on their knees in prayer. The good man prayed for his enemies and persecutors, asking God to bless them, and to change their hearts. The scene was wonderful. Wicked men, who but an hour before were full of the revelries of wake-time, became penitent seekers for mercy, and my father was among the number. The burden of his song was :—

‘ Vile and full of sin I am,
Thou art full of truth and grace.’

Nor did he leave that little homestead until he sang, as heartily and as earnestly as the best among them, the hymn only written, as Mr. Wesley said, a month before (I think it came from Germany), which began—

‘ Give to the winds thy fears ;
Hope and be undismayed,’

which hymn they sang, as Paul and Silas sang, at midnight."

"And they, too, were in a prison house," I said.

"Yes," said Barbara, "and it was not till the dawning that the crowd of warders went away, and they were set free. Then Mr. Wesley made good his escape to Birmingham, but not until he had given my father his old Bible as a memorial of his deliverance. My father gave it me, as he lay upon his dying-pillow. It was his only legacy, he said, but it has been a precious legacy to me."

Barbara paused, overcome by the exertion of her narrative, and little Alec and I, crossing her withered hand with silver coins, quitted her clean though humble fireside, not a little thankful that we had been privileged to listen to the story of Barbara's legacy.





THE LEEK-SEED CHAPEL.

SOON after the promulgation of Methodism in England, it spread with great rapidity over the counties of Devon and Cornwall, and especially among the miners and lower orders. For a long period after its introduction the clergy and higher orders of society in the West of England manifested a degree of dislike to the new doctrines which can scarcely be imagined in these days of modern toleration. It was thought by many young gentlemen good sport to break the windows and nail up the doors of a Methodist chapel. The robbery of a Wesleyan preacher, as a spree, by two young gentlemen, became the subject of judicial investigation, and the frolicsome young men had to pay very dearly for their practical joke.

Among the uninstructed local preachers was one known by the name of "The Old Gardener." This old man was no common character, indeed he was quite an original, and by far the most popular preacher among the disciples of John Wesley in that vicinity. He kept a small nursery garden about two miles from the town of St. A——, working hard at his occupation as a gardener by day, and praying and preaching to his fellow-sinners, as he called them, in the evening. He lived in the poorest manner, giving away all the surplus of his earnings in charity, distributing Bibles, and promoting to the utmost of his ability the extension of Methodism. His complexion was a sort of dirty, dark iron-grey, and his whole appearance lean and grotesque. Although extremely ignorant, he possessed no small degree of cunning, and great personal courage. Of this the following incident affords ample evidence :—

The "Old Gardener" was once subjected to a burglary and attempt at robbery. He lived with his wife in a small and somewhat dilapidated cottage not far from the high road. Three young "squires" who had just

finished their studies at the University, and who all despised and hated Methodism, having heard that the old man had been recently making a collection to build a Methodist chapel, thought it would be a good frolic to rob him temporarily of the proceeds of his collection. The result of the frolic is best related in the words of one of the actors:—

“We set out,” said he, “upon our expedition with blackened faces, on a dark night a little before twelve o’clock. We had dined late, and all of us had Dutch as well as Cornish courage; yet I confess, when it came to the point, I felt myself a coward. I began to reflect that it was but a dastardly frolic to frighten a poor old man and his wife in the dead of the night.

“The clock struck twelve. ‘Now comes the witching time of night,’ exclaimed Tom.

“‘Don’t let us frighten the poor couple out of their wits,’ said I.

“‘No,’ said Ryder, ‘we will be gentle robbers—gentle as Robin Hood and Little John.’

“I said that I would rather travel back than proceed. ‘Recollect,’ said I, ‘the old

fellow is an old soldier as well as a saint, and fears nothing human.'

" 'Nonsense,' exclaimed Ryder, 'here goes.'

"He pressed the feeble door of the cottage in which the old man resided ; it immediately gave way and flew open. We entered and found ourselves in a sort of kitchen. To our great surprise there was a light shining from an inner room. This made us hesitate.

" 'Who is out there at this time of night ?' exclaimed a hoarse voice from within. I knew it to be the unmistakable voice of the 'Old Gardener.'

" 'Give us your money, and no harm shall befall you,' said Tom, 'but we must have your money.'

" 'The Lord will be my defence,' rejoined the 'Old Gardener.' 'You shall have no money from me ; all in the house is the Lord's —take it if you dare !'

" 'We must and will have it,' said we, as we entered the inner room, after taking the precaution of fastening the chamber door as we entered.

"We soon wished we had suffered it to remain open, as you will see.

"Now consider us face to face with the 'Old Gardener'; and a pretty sight we presented. Three ruffians (ourselves) with white waggoners' frocks and blackened faces. Before us the 'Old Gardener,' sitting on the side of his bed. He wore a red worsted



nightcap, a check shirt, and a flannel jacket; his iron-grey face, fringed with a grizzled beard, looking as cool and undismayed as if he had been in the pulpit preaching. A table was by the side of the bed, and immediately in front of him, on a large deal table, was an open Bible, close to which we ob-

served, to our horror, a heap of gunpowder, large enough to blow up a castle. A candle was burning on the table, and the old fellow had a steel in one hand and a large flint in the other. We were all three completely paralyzed. The wild, iron-faced, determined look of the 'Old Gardener,' the candle, the flint and steel, and the great heap of powder, absolutely froze our blood, and made cowards of us all. The gardener saw the impression he had made.

"'What! do you want to rob and murder?' exclaimed he; 'you had better join with me in prayer, miserable sinners that you all are! Repent, and you may be saved. You will soon be in another world!'

"Ryder first recovered his speech.

"'Please to hear me, Mr. Gardener. I feel that we have been wrong, and if we may depart we will make reparation, and give you all the money we have in our pockets.'

"We laid our purses on the table before him.

"'The Lord has delivered you into my hands. It was so revealed to me in a dream. We shall all soon be in another world. Pray,

let us pray." And down he fell upon his knees, close to the table, with the candle burning and the ugly flint and steel in his hand. He prayed and prayed. At last he appeared exhausted. He stopped, and eyed the purses; and then emptied one of them out on the table. He appeared surprised, and, I thought, gratified, at the largeness of its contents. We now thought we should have to retire; but to our dismay the 'Old Gardener' said,—

"'Now we will praise God by singing the Hundredth Psalm.'

"This was agony to us all. After the psalm the old man took up the second purse; and while he was examining its contents, Ryder, who was close behind Tom and myself, whispered softly,—

"'I have unfastened the door; when you hear me move make a rush.'

"The 'Old Gardener' then pouring out the contents of the second purse, exclaimed,—

"'Why there is almost enough to build our new house of God! Let me see what the third contains.'

"He took up the third purse.

“‘Now!’ whispered Ryder, ‘make a rush.’

“We did so, and at the same moment heard the old fellow hammering away with his flint and steel. We expected to be instantly blown into fragments. The front door, however, flew open before us; the next step we found ourselves in the garden. The night was pitchy dark. We rushed blindly through the nursery ground, scrambled through brambles and prickly shrubs, ran our heads against trees, then forced ourselves through a thick hedge. At last, with scratched faces, torn hands, and tattered clothes, we tumbled over a bank into the high road.

“Our horses were soon found, and we galloped to Ryder’s residence. Lights were procured, and we sat down. We were black, ragged, and dirty. We looked at each other, and, in spite of our miserable adventure, roared with laughter.

“‘We may laugh,’ exclaimed Tom, ‘but if this adventure is blown, and we are found out, Cornwall will be too hot for us for the next seven years. We have made a pretty night of it. We have lost our money; being

obliged to pretend to pray for two long hours before a great heap of gunpowder ; while that iron-faced, ugly, red-capped brute threatened us all with an immediate passage into eternity ! And our money, forsooth, must go to build a Methodist meeting-house ! Bah ! It is truly horrible. The fellow has played the old soldier on us with a vengeance, and we shall be the laughing-stock of the whole country.'

"The affair was not yet ended. Reports were spread that three men, disguised as black demons, with horns and tails, had entered the cottage of the 'Old Gardener,' who had not only terrified them, but had frightened them out of a good sum of money, which he intended to devote to the building of a new Methodist meeting-house. It was given out that on the following Sunday the 'Old Gardener' intended to preach a sermon, and afterwards solicit subscriptions for the meeting-house, when he would relate the remarkable manner in which he had been providentially assisted with funds for the building. Our mortification was complete. Tom, whose hatred of Methodism was intense, declared he

would blow up the meeting-house as soon as it was built. Our curiosity, however, was excited, and we all three determined to hear our adventure of the night related by the 'Old Gardener,' if we could contrive to be present without being suspected. Sunday evening arrived. The meeting-house was crammed to suffocation, and with the dim lights then burning in the chapel we had no difficulty in concealing ourselves. The sermon was short, but the statement of our adventures was related most minutely and circumstantially in the old man's quaint, homely, and humorous phraseology. This evening he seemed to excel himself, and was exultingly humorous. The old fellow's face glowed with delight and satisfaction. 'I never,' said he, 'saw black faces pray with greater devotion. I have some doubt, however,' he slyly observed, 'if their prayers were quite heavenward. They sometimes turned their faces toward the door, but a lifting of the flint and steel kept them quiet.'

"He then added, with a knowing shake of the head and an exulting laugh, 'But they had not smelt powder like the old soldier

whom they came to rob. No, no, it was a large heap—ay, large enough to frighten Old General Clive himself. The candle was lighted, the flint and steel were ready. You may ask, my friends, if I myself was not afraid. No, no, my dear friends,’ shouted he, ‘this large heap of apparent gunpowder was—it was my stock, my whole year’s stock of leek (onion) seed!’

“The whole congregation somewhat irreverently laughed; even the saints almost shouted; many clapped their hands. I was for the moment stupefied by the announcement, but at last could hardly suppress my own laughter.

“We subscribed to the fund to avoid suspicion, and left the meeting. After the sermon we joined each other, but could not speak. We could barely chuckle, ‘Leek-seed,’ and then roared with laughter.

“It was a good joke, though not exactly to our taste. It has, however, more than once served for subsequent amusement.

“The chapel was built with the money collected by the gardener. Time and circumstance now induce me to think that there has

been no detriment to morality or religion by the erection of the meeting-house which the High Church party named 'The Leek-Seed Chapel.' ”



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